



News & Views

Joyce McDonald

State Representative • 25th District



1997 Session Wrap-up

Committees:

Law and Justice (vice chair)
Children and Family Services
Trade and Economic
Development

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Dear neighbors,

The 105-day 1997 legislative session is over! This certainly was an action-packed and extremely productive session. I am very pleased with the legislation we passed, especially the bills of major importance that reflect strong family values and a common-sense, efficient approach to government. **Inside this newsletter are some of the highlights.**

As your 25th District state representative, I want to:

- Help if you are having a problem with a state agency
- Answer any questions you may have about legislation or the functions of state government (remember, newspapers and TV news don't always give a complete picture)
- Listen to your ideas for legislation — most legislation originates with ideas from the people
- Arrange for you to testify during session about a bill of interest before the appropriate committee

Between now and the 1998 legislative session, I can be reached through my legislative assistant, Kirby Hopper, in my Olympia office at 360-786-7948, or call the toll-free hotline at 1-800-562-6000 and we will return your call.

I have scheduled a group of coffee hours throughout the next few months so I might have an opportunity to meet with you personally and keep in touch.

I look forward to seeing or hearing from you.

Warm regards,

Joyce

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State Representative

► Welfare Reform

The most significant change made to Washington law this past session was reforming our state's welfare system. These historic, Republican-led changes underscore our resolve to overhaul our broken welfare system and finally require that able-bodied individuals accept personal responsibility and work for their benefits.

Our new welfare reform law eliminates the entitlement status of welfare. The old system allowed individuals to collect taxpayer-financed welfare checks indefinitely. Our new system requires applicants to work or perform activities leading to a job in exchange for state financial support. This new system provides both incentives and assistance to help people become productive and will help enable them to support themselves and their families.

People who find work will still be able to collect welfare cash grants as they advance up the ladder of self-sufficiency. The state will also help them by providing an improved level of child care as they move towards total independence.

Those unable to find a job will be assessed to determine why. The state will then provide job training or work-search training and child care to help them land a job.

Teen-age parents will no longer be able to use welfare to finance their independence. They will be required to live with a parent or other responsible adult and to finish their education.

To help single parents stay off welfare, the new law requires non-custodial parents to pay court-ordered child support or risk losing their driver's or other licenses.

In a last-minute compromise with the governor, who vetoed parts of our welfare reform bill, we agreed to provide welfare to **legal** immigrants after they've been here one year and then only if their sponsor's income is added to the immigrant's income in the eligibility calculations.

► Tax Reductions

Another example of our determination to reduce the cost of government for you, the taxpayer, is our tax reduction package that will save Washington state citizens \$393 million in the next two years. We passed more than two dozen tax reduction bills aimed at allowing you to keep more of your hard-earned money and stimulating our economy towards producing more family-wage jobs.

In the first weeks of session, we passed the biggest reduction, a property tax reduction bill which the governor then vetoed. So we passed it again, but this time with a referendum clause **allowing you to vote on it this fall**. If you approve it, property tax reductions

over the next two years will total more than \$220 million. Savings to the owner of a \$110,000 home would be \$46 next year and increase yearly to total as much as \$23,000 over the life of a 30-year mortgage.

We also approved a number of tax reductions for businesses which will help them expand and provide more jobs, not only throughout our state but also here locally in the Puyallup/Sumner area. One reduction, which the governor also vetoed and we had to scale back to gain his signature, rolls back the huge B&O tax increase on small service companies. This will save you or your

neighbors who own service businesses such as barber shops or accounting businesses, for example, \$94 million statewide in 1998.

► Gas Tax

While there is no disputing the need our state has to invest heavily in roads, bridges and ferries, the suggestion to raise the state's gas tax to pay for them did not come up for a vote in the Legislature. We'll be looking for other ways to fund transportation improvements.



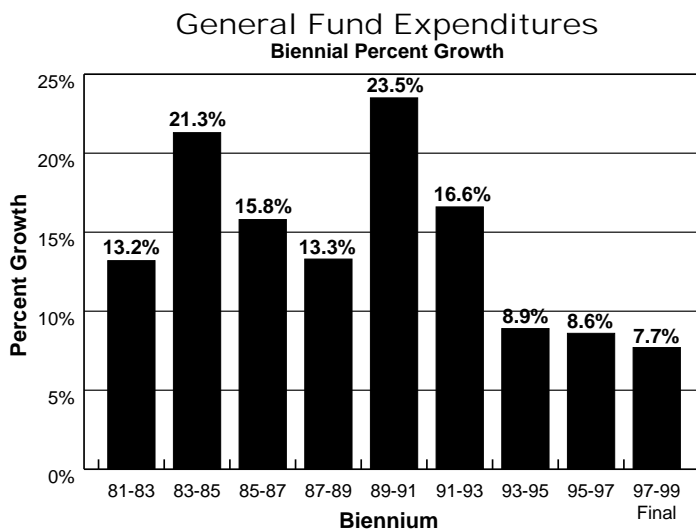
Joyce escorts Supreme Court Justice Barbara Durham in the House during opening day of the session ceremonies.

1997 Session Wrap-up

► *State Budget*

Our final state operating budget also reflects Republicans' commitment to reduce the size and cost of government. While the 1997-1999 two-year \$19.073 billion budget represents a 7.7 percent increase over the 1995-1997 budget (a per year increase about equal to the increase in population plus inflation), it is the smallest increase in 25 years. I see this as a great achievement by the Legislature!

Our budget will hold spending **\$112 million under the Initiative 601 spending limit this biennium**. Staying under the I-601 limit was our objective because that will



automatically hold down future limits and, again, move us toward our objective of reducing the cost of government. For example, over the next six years, that \$112 million balloons to a minimum of \$804 million in taxpayer savings. Although it takes time to undo years of unchecked government growth, we are making a difference!

► *Education*

The 1997 Legislature took seriously its obligation to make education the primary duty of state government. Not only did we approve record levels of funding for both K-12 and higher education, but we also approved program reforms to significantly improve the quality of our children's education.

Our \$8.9 billion kindergarten through 12th grade education budget increases spending by \$168 per pupil.

It funds salary and health benefit increases for employees, school construction, and program enhancements totaling \$363 million. Included in the program enhancements are additional computer and other technology acquisitions, more instructional materials, and funding to help teachers prepare for new statewide academic tests which are part of the 1993 education reform plan.

We also passed a number of bills increasing the **quality of education**. Our **A-D-Cs of Education** package improving Academics, Discipline, and Community involvement and Choice included one academic law to require testing of second graders' reading skills and providing extra help for those who need it. Among the discipline-improving bills we passed were bills to strengthen schools' abilities to deal with gang activities, intruders, drug and alcohol use, expulsions, and dress codes. We also passed several bills increasing opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's education and to give schools more choices, as in hiring teachers.

Our higher education budget allows 6,390 additional students to enroll in public colleges, mostly in community/technical colleges such as Pierce College-Puyallup. We also passed a law that substantially increases funding to \$34 million over the next two years for financial aid grants, our state's work study program and other aid programs.

► *Juvenile Crime Reduction*

As vice chair of the House Law and Justice Committee, I am proud of the long-overdue corrections to our lax, ineffective, permissive 1977 juvenile justice laws. The reforms that originated in our committee and passed the Legislature are intended to reduce juvenile crime, which has increased dramatically while other crime rates have decreased. Also, our new law will enable police and courts to send the most violent, hard-core juvenile criminals through the adult justice system where they will serve hard time for armed crime and be subject to "Three Strikes and You're Out" laws.

The reforms also will hold all juvenile offenders accountable for their first crime, no matter what the offense. Not only will this force them to respect the law and end the contempt juveniles have for the current lax system, but it also will deter them from a life of crime before they become habitual offenders.

► *Same-sex Marriage*

Gov. Gary Locke vetoed our bill defining marriage as only between a man and a woman. We attempted to bypass him and put the measure on the ballot, but that effort died for lack of support.

► *Seahawks Stadium*

I heard compelling arguments on both sides of the stadium-financing issue, and there is no doubt in my mind that professional football can be a positive influence to families and youngsters all over the state. However, **it is my firm conviction that government should not be raising taxes and spending public funds to build a stadium for a privately owned, profit-motivated sports franchise.** Despite my "no" vote for the bill that would spend public money,

preparations are now underway for a vote by the people in June. I am satisfied in knowing that the citizens of Washington will make the final decision on this issue.

► *Joyce's Bills*

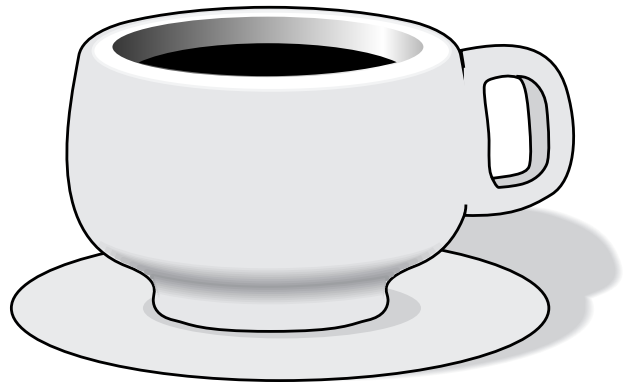
I sponsored several bills in the House, some of which became law. One would authorize Pierce County to add five Superior Court judges in the next three years. The state will match the county with funding for these positions. It is crucial that the county have the tools necessary to reduce the current court backlog and to ensure swift justice.

Another of my bills would reimburse the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department \$700,000 for an error made in the distribution of Motor Vehicle Excise Taxes. The money will be used for public health purposes.

C o f f e e

Please consider coming to one of the following meetings so we can talk personally about any issue on your mind.

- **Saturday, May 31, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.** at Puyallup (downtown) Library
- **Saturday, June 7, 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.** at Mrs. Turner's Restaurant, 701 E. Main, Puyallup
- **Saturday, June 14, 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.** at Sumner Library



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